

FOREWORD

I HAVE A WEAKNESS for showbiz partnerships. I was raised watching Laurel & Hardy, Burns & Allen, Abbott & Costello, Martin & Lewis, Wayne & Schuster, and later the Smothers Brothers. But until I met Mark and Joe as Puke & Snot in 1975, at the Minnesota Renaissance Festival, I'd never seen a professional comedy team in person. In the midst of the costumed parades and confounded bagpipes, there was the one outstanding show – an event, really.

It was pure, naked theater. Two men, no scenery, no lights, no amplification, not even a stage. Just voices, faces, bodies, swords, writing, and charisma. You'd hear Puke & Snot bellow insults at each other in the middle of some dusty, empty path, and ten minutes later you'd hear hundreds of people, stopped in their tracks in transports of merriment.

To someone like me, who had come up in magic with the idea that the tricks and visual effects were the show and the performer was just the delivery system, Puke & Snot were startling. Their show wasn't about what they did. It was about what they *were*.

Festivals are full of hippies. They paint stars on their faces. Their shows are paced like pottery-making. They smoke pot and live in tents. Penn and I bought a tent but, after one night in it, we moved to a motel. We didn't want dirt, dope, and drumming.

We wanted show biz. And that's what Mark and Joe were. They played the period stuff ironically, bouncing their own all-Americanness off the antique language. Nobody at their show – neither performers nor audience – was actually pretending to be in Merrie Olde. This was real. And beyond the *show*, these boys had the *biz* part down, too; they were the top-earning act on the circuit.

For some reason Puke & Snot took a shine to us. Maybe it was because we liked anachronisms, too. I used a flashlight in my act, and Penn incited applause by asking the audience to imagine Farrah Fawcett-Majors being beaten to death with baseball bats.

Puke & Snot and Penn & Teller hung together and talked music and money and theater and sex. We scoffed at the costumed goat the festival called a “unicorn.” Mark gave sound advice: At Renaissance Faires, avoid coffee. It will ruin your day, since the sanitation is only marginally better than the 14th century.

In 1978 Penn and I (with our musicological colleague Wier Chrisemer) lucked into a long run in San Francisco with our three-man show, *Asparagus Valley Cultural Society*, and discontinued festival work. Then in 1981, Penn and I ended that run to launch our stage play, *Mrs. Lonsberry's Séance of Horror*. It was going to change magic and theater forever. It flopped and all of a sudden we were starting over. In 1982 we were back in the woods of Minnesota doing shows every weekend. Puke & Snot were there too—by now so popular they packed the largest stages at every show.

On weeknights, Puke & Snot were booked in clubs, and they invited us to share the bill (as they gently put it – we were actually opening for them) at the Comedy Cabaret in Minneapolis. It was our first non-Renfest gig as “Penn & Teller” and started us on a new kind of material.

In this book, Mark will tell you about the P&S&P&T collaboration on *The Hanging of Mortimer Faust*, our dream of a festival attraction that could *make money without us even being there (!)*. But, being a modest man, Mark won't tell you why Puke & Snot became part of your heart when you saw them.

It's because under the shouts and swaggers, under the jokes and bits and insults, you felt between these two great actors a deep, true partnership, so palpable it made your skin feel warm, no matter how dank the Minnesota dusk.

Teller

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